Situation Comedy Essay, Research Paper

Situation Comedy

Before writing this essay, I watched a old re-run of ?The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air?, and I read the chapter in the television textbook where a episode of ?Leave It to Beaver? was broken down into Act One, Act Two, Act Three and Act Four. It was there that I realized that since 1951, with the premiere of ?I Love Lucy?, that most sitcoms follow a very basic, but successful pattern. I will demonstrate how this is accomplished in the sitcom week in and week out. The first act must establish the situation in the show. The second act must show the complication involved in the particular episode. The third act must show the confusion the actors or actresses go through, and the fourth must have the solution for the complication and the confusion.

In the first few minutes of a sitcom, the viewer will be shown something that catches their eyes. In most cases, that will establish the situation for which the episode will be based on. For example, in ?Fresh Prince of Bel-Air? we see that the shows main character, Will, gets slapped in the face by a beautiful woman, who at first hugged him. The show then cuts to a commercial having established the situation and knowing that the audience is putting down the remote control and waiting to find out why Will got slapped. In the television textbook, Wally and the Beav agree to take care of a neighbor valuable cat against the advice of their father, Ward, who thinks about what will happen while the cat is under their care. That sets up the situation where the audience knows something is going to happen to the cat but doesn?t know what. So the audience will remain glued to that episode of ?Leave It to Beaver? until they find out what going to happen.

After the commercial break, the audience will see the complication in that episode. In the ?Fresh Prince of Bel-Air?, Will finds out that Jackie (the female character) slapped him because he never called her after he left Philadelphia. Adding to that conflict, Will and Carlton are evicted from their apartment because of a party that was thrown by Will?s friend Jazz. In the television textbook, a friend talks Wally into going to the carnival and leaving the cat with the Beav. On his way out, Wally leaves the yard gate open and the cat disappears. After the Beav and Wally?s search ends up fruitless, the boys try to figure out a plan to disguise the real reason the cat is gone for their parents sense something is not right.

After yet another commercial break, act four will begin. As I stated earlier, act three is confusion. In ?Fresh Prince of Bel-Air?, Jackie is confused and upset when she finds out that Will had kept up with all his old friends from Philadelphia except for her. Carlton also adds to Will?s problems when he decides to move back home and not to another apartment. Will does not want to move back and is in a bind because he can not afford a apartment by himself. In the television textbook the example that is given for confusion is that Ward and June (the parents) realize that the cat is missing and they confront the boys about it. Having no other options, the boys confess. Then the Beav hears a cat?s meow, and he rushes to the sound, where he finds the cat in the back yard.

The fourth and final act in most cases solves the dilemma that was addressed in that episode. In ?Fresh Prince of Bel-Air?, for example, Jackie and Will talk out their problems and become friends again and even become co-workers. Carlton and Will decide to compromise and move back into Carlton parent?s pool house. In the television textbook, the neighbor comes back to get his cat and is happy to see it is all right. The neighbor gives them a dollar for their efforts. After the neighbor leaves, Ward confronts the kids and makes them feel guilty about taking the money. Overcome with guilt, the boys give the dollar to their father.

In this essay, I have demonstrated how almost all sitcom are cut from the same cloth, even though one was made in the 1950?s (Leave It to Beaver) and the other in the 1990?s (Fresh Prince of Bel-Air). By that I do not mean that all sitcoms are the same when it comes to social, economic and political issues. But almost all of them including the ?Fresh Prince of Bel-Air? follow the four-act formula.